

OK. Malke, why don't we start again when you came to Izky?

I didn't come to Izky. I came to Prague on the train, where my girlfriend met a cousin of hers who wanted to take us off the train. He said don't go back to Izky. It's not safe. It's full of Russians.

I don't think they're ever going to give it back to Czechoslovakia. It's never going to be Czechoslovakia, and you might get stuck in there. Besides that it wasn't safe to travel for women by themselves. She got off, and I said no.

I said I don't believe it. I want to go home. I think somebody else will come home. Because if I survived, somebody else must have survived.

If I stay in Prague, if they went home, if somebody survived, and they went home, and I stay here, we might never find each other, or it might take years. My sister was two years older than I was. So I figured if nobody else survived, she should have because she was older.

So I continued. She got off. Then I was on my own.

But we got as far as Budapest, and the train wasn't going any further than that. So, again, already the Jewish community was organizing. They took us off the trains.

They provided housing in schools, in places. They had soup kitchens, and they fed us. They gave us some clothes.

Where did you live?

They provided housing. They had empty school buildings. They had empty dormitories. Whatever was available, they just put up cots all over the places and just put people up. We were transients. But they said now it's up to you whether you want to go, you want to stay, you want to wait till something happens.

It was just '45. The war just ended. Nothing was going on, there was no postal service. There was no telephone service.

There was no way. There was no transportation, either, because the railroads were bombed out. Whatever was available, there was a lot of army personnel being moved around. The Russians coming, leaving, Hungarians, Germans, prisoners. There was no way you could just make a schedule and went, you know.

So I stayed there for quite a while. Then I met a cousin who also was liberated. He was going also from place to place where he knew that people are staying, some refugees were staying.

So he went from each center to center looking for somebody. When he found me, he said you know, your dad is alive and one of your uncles is alive, my father's brother. He heard from somebody else that they were liberated, and they went home.

Well, if they went home, then, for sure I have to go home. So he went with me. He was a man, so that was a little bit safer if you were with a man.

We went to the railroad station. It was free. One thing, you didn't have to buy tickets. Anybody, refugees and things, if you could get on a train, you could go.

I mean, nobody stopped you. They weren't asking for tickets because we didn't have any money and they didn't ask for any. You could just go.

By every station that the train stopped, there were always somebody from the Joint. They knew that people were going, traveling, looking for things. So they always provided food. Anytime the train stopped at a station, there were people there giving out food and things.

Believe it or not, I got all the way back to Izky, the last about 20 kilometers on a horse and buggy, because there was nothing going any further than that. My father was home, and a brother of his was home. My father told me that another brother who was in the army and was captured, he was in Russia during the war, is also survived, but he was someplace in Czechoslovakia and they weren't sure. They heard that he survived, but they weren't sure where he was.

So we stayed there through the whole summer because we were hoping that maybe-- people were drifting in. Here a boy, here a girl, you know, survived, came looking for somebody.

So we opened one of the houses. The Jewish homes, most of them were closed down, and nobody lived in them except maybe some Russian soldiers who were stationed there.

So one of the houses that was empty, everybody who came there congregated in that one house, you know. My father already had planted some vegetables in the garden. My father was liberated in February.

Where was he when he was liberated?

He was in Poland in a concentration camp, in a working camp. He got liberated sometime in February yet, but the war was not finished. So they were just following behind. As the front was progressing, they were behind it.

It took them a long time. They didn't get home till April, either. But by the time I got home, it was, like, July, the end of July by the time I got home.

What was that reunion like when you first saw each other? Did he think you were dead?

He knew that I was alive because somebody who saw me someplace in Budapest at one time got there before I got there. Boys could travel faster. They could jump on a truck with soldiers. Maybe a military truck was going. They could climb on and go take a ride.

They were hitchhiking, which I couldn't do. Girls couldn't do that. So it took me a few months to get home. It took the other one-- so he knew that one, he didn't know who, if either me or I had an elder sister, which one of us survived. But he knew that one is someplace. So he was expecting me.

You can imagine what kind of reunion. It was mostly tearful, because nobody-- you know. Where was the rest of the family?

By then, we kind of knew that most of them didn't. My brothers, one was 10 and one was 13. We knew that they couldn't have possibly survived.

My mother, who was in her late 40s, she wasn't a very strong woman. We doubted whether-- from the survivors that you could see, you knew that those didn't survive. Mostly the ones who survived were between 16 and, maybe, 30. Those were the survivors. Anything younger didn't survive and anything older didn't survive, either.

But your father did.

Men, a little bit more so. Because I guess maybe men, they had more work for? Men could do more. The younger than 16, they just killed off right off. The older ones, probably, the ones who weren't killed right away, they just didn't make it. It was just too hard.

So the men probably were stronger. They needed more manpower. But what kind of work could they get out of women, you know, this type of women?

They needed hard labor. They didn't need anybody for office work or social services or anything. So that's why probably they left a lot more men, a little bit older men survived.

Not many-- of the whole town, my father's age, only two came back. From all those people, only two. I don't remember anybody else my father's age.

His brother, who was, maybe, 10 years younger than my father, was also in his 40s, and he came back. The one who was in the army survived, but that one was, like, in his 30s at that time. He survived.

So very few, but some did. Men, I think, some more men survived, the older age than the women. We stayed there till October, September, October, still hoping that maybe somebody will still come.

Did the town look different? Were buildings destroyed? The buildings weren't destroyed, except that all the Jewish homes were wrecked. Vandalized, let's put it that way.

Nobody moved in yet, because we were only gone one year. I guess maybe the people still thought maybe somebody is going to still-- they didn't know, either, what's going to happen. See, while the Hungarians were there, they probably wouldn't give them permission to move or anything. When the Russians came in, they stationed soldiers. They needed places for the soldiers to stay.

They were pretty vandalized. By then, the soldiers were pulling out. Nobody took over. The owners didn't come back. So it was just vandalized. It was very sad.

The population didn't know, either, how to react. Some were glad to see you. Some who took maybe some of your property were afraid that you will take it back and were quite hostile. Even though you were friends before the war, they weren't too glad to see you.

It wasn't a rich town. People were mostly poor. And once they get hold of something, they were very reluctant to give it back. We got some of the stuff back from some of the neighbors.

So that my father, like, fixed up a house, not our house, somebody else's house whose was bigger and was probably less vandalized. I guess they picked the one that was the least vandalized one. Whatever they could get, blankets and things, and anybody who came just stay there, you know.

So by the end of October, we realized that nobody else is coming. Also, they partitioned Czechoslovakia. The Russians decided to keep this particular part of Czechoslovakia, and we figured we better get out of it.

So we just packed up. Would you believe it, again, packed up whatever we could carry? Meantime, they closed the borders off. So it wasn't this free traveling back and forth anymore, either. We waited a little bit too long.

So we went to another town. They organized. It was, like, when I read here about American history, about the railroad, when they were trying to get the slaves out, the same thing. There were Jewish railroads, too, that they organized people, and they got us across the border. We had to go across the border without government permission.

So we organized a group who wanted to get out. We went to a little town that was very close to the Hungarian border. At night, we just walked over the border.

We had some guides that were paid money. They collected from everybody whatever they could, and they bribed some people, peasants who lived on the border who knew every route. They knew how the border guard was working.

They knew when they were walking back and forth. They knew at what point they are at a certain time. They just whisked us across.

Were you scared?

Yes, very. You couldn't cough. You couldn't talk. You couldn't utter any sound at all.

Did you have anything with you? Suitcases?

No. How can you carry suitcases? You know what the Carpathian Mountains look like, walking up and then down? You just carried a little-- I had a thing on my back, just what you could carry very lightly, you know.

Maybe a suit of clothes if you had one to spare, what you had on you, that's all. You were lucky if you get out alive. Because crossing the border with Russian guards patrolling, it wasn't very safe.

So the guides, they got us into a ravine. They told us all-- and we could hear the dogs, the guards walking on top of the hill. So the guide said now, you be here and be real quiet, and that they are going to go check where the guards are and they should know how to get across.

They left. They left, and we were waiting, and we are waiting. When you are waiting and you are scared, every minute seems like they've been gone for hours. And oh, my God, now if they abandoned us here, and the Russians are find us, then that's going to be our graveyard. Because if we escape from Germany, we are never going to escape here because they knew what we were doing.

But they came back. They waited there till they saw that it was safe. They came back, and they got us across the border.

We got into Hungary. We were sliding down a steep hill that we couldn't even walk. We had to get away from the border as fast as we could because they could still shoot. As long as they saw you and they saw that you crossed, they could shoot, still shoot after you.

But we got down into a little town. It was organized. Like I said, it was like the Black railroad. They had other people waiting for us down there. There's a horse and buggy.

They took us to-- but we didn't have any papers for there, either. We weren't supposed to be there. They had houses that risked their lives or a long prison sentence by taking us in. They were paid for it, but still they kept us in the house for a whole day. They didn't dare, we didn't dare show our faces in that little town, either, because everybody knows everybody in a little town.

In the evening, there were other people, again, who knew when the guard is changing to cross into Czechoslovakia. Because we could claim Czech citizenship, even though this was Russia already. The part where we were born was Russia, but we could claim Czech citizenship because I was born in Czechoslovakia. That part was Czechoslovakia when I was born.

So if we could only cross into Czechoslovakia, we would be all right. We would be considered Czech citizens just returning from concentration camp. So, again, we had to wait. Then some people crossed us.

The guard was paid off, because there was a bridge to cross. So there was no way you could get across there, just sneak across. But they had guards who could be bribed. The guards were bribed. We got across.

Then we were all right. Because there already was Joint, again, the Joint distribution centers. They put us on a train, and we got to Prague. They had centers where they put you up.

Did you wonder if you were ever going to have a home again?

We were so busy just surviving at that time that you really didn't think of the future much. It was just you didn't know from day to day whether you will survive while this was going on. Once we got to Czechoslovakia, we could go to the Ministry of Interior and register and proclaim our citizenship.

Then we were finally citizens, again, human beings. Then we had papers. We could move around. You could go out and rent an apartment and look for work and start living a normal life, more or less. And that's what happened.

We met up with my other uncle that was in the Czech army. Well, he came from Russia. He was in Russia, but he was with the Czech army. So he had all kinds of privileges. Because housing was very scarce, but he, as a soldier, he was single, and he rented an apartment.

So it was me, my father, my two uncles. Here I'm all of 17, not yet 18 years old. I had no idea about housekeeping, and here I have three guys to take care of. I don't think they ate very well, not that there was any much food to be had. But I also didn't know anything about cooking or washing or keeping house at all.

Then, finally, one of my uncles got married. Then the other one got married. We moved to another part of Czechoslovakia. We didn't stay in Prague.

We moved to a town called Carlsbad, Karlovy Vary in Czech. It was Karslbad. I met my husband, and we got married.

How did you meet him?

See, how you say about remembering, I skipped that over. When we got liberated in Bergen-Belsen, a cousin of mine, as a matter of fact, also went looking. Like I say, the guys could move around a little better than the women could because they could go hitchhike. We couldn't.

So they could move. When he came to this camp, particular camp in Bergen-Belsen, he said I know that your father is alive. I said how do you know that?

He said because I was in another camp a few miles from here. There is a camp. It's called Celle. I met somebody there who was in concentration camp with your dad. He knows that your father got liberated, that he survived.

But he didn't know anything else. I said, well, how do I get in touch with him. So he said, well, he's in that camp, if you can get there.

So we went to the military. There was somebody who was managing, to the manager. I told him. He said, well, there is a Jeep going every day, once. Between the two camps, there was a Jeep going, a military Jeep.

He said, if you want to go, you have to get on the list. You will get a ticket, kind of. They only took so many each day, you know, how many could get in a Jeep, three, four people. Who had legitimate reasons that they wanted to go, you could go, and they brought you back.

So I got on the list. Finally, I got on. They took me there to Celle. And I met-- I was looking for him. I went into the office, and I said who I was looking for. I met him.

He said, yeah, your father is alive. Because when they evacuated them, they left the old and the sick people behind. My father was left behind because he was older, and he was very sick. He was only 50, but he was sick, and he was very weak. He was staying behind.

But they only marched, like, one night. They knew that the camp got liberated. They heard.

They were so close. How much can you go on foot, a bunch of sick, weak people? They couldn't have gone very far.

So he knew that my father, if he didn't get killed in that one night, he got out all right. So that's how I met him. Then we separated, again, naturally, because I was put in a women's camp. He was in a men's camp.

When I came to Budapest, I met him again. There was a kitchen where you could go and eat. We didn't have any money. Nobody had any money.

There wasn't any food available, anyway. Everything was rationed. If you weren't a citizen of that country, and not in

that particular town, you didn't get any coupons for food. So there was a kitchen where you went to eat, and I met him there, again.

He said that he's going to go home, too. He doesn't know when, but he's going to go home, eventually. He wants to see, also, for himself, maybe somebody else survived.

Where was he from?

He was also from Czechoslovakia, just from a different town. But he knew my father, because my father and his father used to know each other business-wise, and things like that. Not too far from my town, and his town was Novoselytsia.

So we kept bumping into each other like that. Then when he finally came back to Czechoslovakia, and I came to Carlsbad, we met again. At first we were friends, and then we started dating, and I got married. So me and my father and my husband were in Carlsbad.

What did everybody do there?

My husband worked in a textile [NON-ENGLISH], it was. They used to get material. Everybody had coupons. You could just get so much.

He was managing one of those. My father worked in a factory. I was keeping house sort of, improvising.

Then Czechoslovakia started turning communist. They killed Jan Masaryk, who was the former president's son and who was elected to be president. They said he committed suicide, which they probably threw him out the window.

We saw that that's going to be the end of this, too. We weren't in any mood to--

How long were you there before you had to move again?

'49, so four years, almost four years. So we decided just to pack up. In the meantime, Israel opened up. So we decided we will go to Israel.

The Czech government at that time cooperated because the English didn't want to get out, and the Russians were very interested to get the English out of there, probably hoping that they'll get in. The Czech government was turning communist. They were cooperating with the Russians.

So they figured the best way to get the English out of there is to create a Jewish homeland. They were supporting at that time Israel. They were supporting the Jews. We got passports, and we left in '49 for Israel.

But before we went to Israel, before there was an Israel, we wanted to come to the United States because we didn't want to stay in Europe.

Not even Israel?

At that time, '45, Israel wasn't created until '48. So in '45 and '46 and '47, there was no Israel. We didn't know what we are going to do. We knew that we didn't want to stay in Europe. So we registered with the American consulate to go to America.

But there were so many people coming to America. There was a quota on how many they would allow in every year. There was a preference quota for people who maybe had immediate family, like children, parents, brothers, sisters. We had cousins, so we were at the bottom of the list. That was it. We knew that if we stayed in Czechoslovakia much longer, we won't be able to get out at all.

What did you think America would be like? Did people tell you?

Just free and no reminders and no wondering. Because even though before you were very friendly and neighborly with the non-Jewish population, after we came back, they had a grudge against us, and we certainly had a grudge against them. They were afraid that they'll have to give back whatever they got a hold of.

We had a grudge that they didn't try to help at all, and they didn't. Some, maybe, did. But that part of the country where I come from, they didn't. I don't know how much they could have done, but they didn't try. Nobody tried.

We didn't demand much of them, because we knew that it would be very hard on them, too. We weren't aware of what's going to happen to us, either. Had we been more aware of what is going to happen, probably people would have tried harder, and maybe some could have been persuaded to help. We didn't know, and they probably didn't know, either.

So they weren't willing to risk their lives to protect somebody. We weren't willing to make them risk their lives to protect us. Because we certainly didn't think that we were going to get all killed. From the beginning, we thought we were going to work or whatever. We knew that it's not going to be easy, but we didn't certainly think that we are going to be all killed.

So that was one of the big problems, too. So there was resentment. I said I wouldn't stay there. I don't trust anybody. I couldn't talk to anybody because I wasn't sure.

Is he sympathetic? Is he sorry I came back? Is he sorry that the rest of them didn't come back?

Is he glad that the rest of them didn't come back? You know? I couldn't live there. I knew I couldn't live there.

So I said, I'm getting out of Europe. And to this day, I don't want to see Europe, see? That's been over 40 years.

When people tell me, oh, we are going to Europe. I say, oh, yeah, what for? I mean, what are you going to Europe for?

I mean, those that were born there, that lived through the war, to this day, I can't understand, particularly not Jewish people who go to Europe, any part of Europe, unless you go for a pilgrimage or for a memorial service. I don't want to see it, I don't want to know about it, and I don't care if I never see it again. See, I don't even want to go to my hometown or anything, no nostalgia at all.

OK. Can we end this?

Yeah.

OK. I think that's it.

OK.

I don't care.

Maybe I should move over and say--

I think they probably got that.

They must have.